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In this issue of the *Magazine* we publish two articles illustrating the impact of historical understanding on the present. In the first, James Stevens Curl presents the case that Nikolaus Pevsner's personal value judgements in favour of contemporary style caused him to dismiss earlier historical movements in architecture and design. The possibility, or impossibility, of objectivity in history is a theme almost as old as history itself. It might be argued that in the arts and humanities, where taste and fashion dictate change, the personal preferences of the historian are bound to affect their opinion, but that the same may not apply for the sciences. Historical assessments matter: apparently with increasing frequency, the creation or removal of portraits or statues and the naming or renaming of buildings or academic posts depend on them and so do once revered reputations.

Anthony Edwards presents a case in point, which may throw light on how such historical assessments come about. His account has all the elements of the high drama that one associates with the closeted intimacy of Oxbridge Common Rooms, where academics come up against the mutual incomprehensibility that stems from the differences in expertise and values of their diverse disciplines.

In the words of Adam Rutherford – whose 2022 book *'Control: the Dark History and Troubling Present of Eugenics'* (from which the quotations below are taken) presents an informed, insider view of “a defining idea of the twentieth Century”¹ – Fisher was “in the top tier of scientists of all time”² and “a scientific colossus”³. “Since the age of eighteen, my work and interests have been profoundly influenced by the colossal scientific legacy of Ronald Fisher”⁴, but “Fisher was also a committed eugenicist throughout his life, and maintained close ties with a Nazi scientist [a highly-rated fellow geneticist, Otmar

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von Verschuer] who had worked alongside Josef Mengele on human remains from Jews murdered in death camps.”⁵ Fisher's scientific greatness is beyond dispute.

Edwards has here (and in *Oxford Magazine*, No 432, 2nd Week, TT 2021) given an account of the creation in 1990 of a window in his college to celebrate one of its most

famous members and the recent events that have resulted in its removal. The pattern of events is a familiar one. The immediate trigger came from student activists. The resulting moral panic on the part of the authorities resulted in hurried decisions which, as described by Edwards, paid scant attention to proper governance procedures, but the desired result was soon achieved.

A decisive aspect in this case appears to have been the intervention of an prominent historian of the Nazi period. Immediately after the war Fisher had, along with other eminent British scientists, written a supporting letter expressing his respect for von Verschuer. A single word in that letter appears to have condemned Fisher in the eyes of many who voted to remove the window; the “unfortunate” use of a contextually ambiguous word “stock” was interpreted in entirely different ways by the historian and by the scientist. Edwards disputes a number of the claims made by historians. “Whether Fisher was fully aware of Verschuer's direct associations with Nazi experimentation on people is not known” according to Rutherford⁶. After Fisher's intervention von Verschuer went on to become Director of the Institute for Human Genetics at the University of Munster and member of the American Eugenics Society.⁷

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Few of us, myself included, are in a position to document,

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...and much more

let alone evaluate, either the degree of guilt of von Verschuer or the circumstances of Fisher's letter in support of him. But the removal of the Fisher window – unlikely soon to be reversed – is a relatively minor matter compared to the dismemberment of Fisher's reputation, as part of the overall historical revisionary portrayal of eugenics. His reputation will be very much harder to reverse.

As becomes clear from Rutherford's account, Fisher's attachment to eugenics was part of the widespread, enlightened pre-war view of the beneficial potential of genetics; "it's hard for us to imagine quite how mainstream these ideas were."⁸ Eugenics may have become a dirty word, increasingly expunged wherever possible, but Rutherford devotes much of his book to showing (without committing himself on future history) how, with the benefit of modern genetics, closely similar policies and possibilities are now current. "My caution [in presenting the current position] is not derived from fear, nor from a political stance about liberty or control. It is from a position of expertise..... The glibness with which non-experts start waffling on about a new eugenics enabled by current technology is frustrating ... they are flirting with an idea that in history caused so much harm, without the knowledge to back up the claim that it might be different this time."⁹ "These are inflammatory ideas, and we live in a febrile

age. I am no eugenics apologist and have no desire to appear controversial by trying to reclaim this word from its toxic history."¹⁰

This example of the Fisher window is far from unique. Francis Galton's reputation has already been shredded (*Oxford Magazine*, No 420. 2nd Week, TT 2020). "One striking thing is how inconsistent these reappraisals are."¹¹ Historians bear a heavy responsibility: non-historians depend on their knowledge, expertise and authority, and we all need stories to support our accounting of ourselves.

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How to initiate Congregation actions

How to trigger a debate or discussion in Congregation

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Attendance at meetings of Congregation tends to be low. Postal voting can potentially allow opinion to be easily accessed more widely across Congregation membership. Congregation can trigger a postal vote after a debate (but not after a discussion or a question and reply where no vote is taken). 25 or more members of Congregation have to be present ("on the floor") at the relevant debate. The request must be made by 4pm on the 6th day after the debate, signed by 50 members of Congregation, in writing to the Registrar. Council can also decide to hold a postal ballot, by the same deadline.

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To generate a flysheet for publication with the *Gazette*, the camera-ready copy (2 sides maximum) should be submitted with at least 10 signatures on an indemnity form (obtainable from the Registrar) by 10am on the Monday in the week in which publication is desired.

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The Corruption of History

JAMES STEVENS CURL

It seems that, despite expensive so-called 'architectural education' spanning several years of 'study', many, perhaps most, architects are no longer capable of designing an aesthetically agreeable street, let alone intervene in the urban fabric without making matters much, much worse. It is impossible to create pleasant, ordinary, humane places when every architect is straining to be 'original', which really means cribbing exemplars of the latest fad, an activity that is hardly 'original'.

There was another factor that put paid to the street: in the 1930s a campaign in the USA to promote motor-cars as essential accessories proposed driving highways into towns and cities, destroying traditional streets, discouraging pedestrians, and making cars penetrate everywhere. Even more destructive was the *insistence* by Charles-Édouard Jeanneret (1887-1965 – who, like other totalitarians, gave himself a pseudonym, in this case 'Le Corbusier') that the street, with its mixed uses, was unhygienic and untidy, so *must* be abolished. If one reads Le Corbusier's unpleasantly bossy texts, one is struck by his obsessions concerning hygiene, which were probably encouraged by his association with Pierre-André-Eugène Winter (1891-1952), a man of pronounced authoritarian tendencies, whose theories should strike any fair-minded person as repugnant. Marc Perelman (b.1953) may be perused for a refreshingly sane dissection of Le Corbusier's unappealing works,¹ and the critic Camille Maclair (*aka* Séverin Faust [1872-1945]) did not pull his punches either, questioning an insistence on imposing one style of architecture worldwide.²

Throughout the ages, ornament has featured, an essential element in buildings. The exception has been the 'architecture' that emerged from the 1920s, lauded as 'patently in accordance with the new social and industrial situation'. With 'its refusal to accept craftsmanship and whims of design' it was 'eminently suitable for a large anonymous clientèle'.³ Its sheer surfaces and minimum of mouldings for the industrial production of parts received the *imprimatur* of Nikolaus Pevsner (1902-83) and others. The problems were that buildings constructed after such demands had been embraced did not age gracefully, and indeed failed spectacularly, but succeeded as uncouth interlopers in established streets, towns, and cities. The new puritans, wallowing in the doctrines of Walter Gropius (1883-1969), 'Le Corbusier', *et al.*, were hearkened to among 'progressive' persons, with startling results, but the chief catalysts were those intimately connected with commerce, finance, and politics.

It became apparent that something very strange had occurred: an aberration, something alien to the history of humanity, destructive aesthetically and spiritually, ugly and unpleasant, inhumane and abnormal, yet something that was almost universally accepted in architectural circles, like some fundamentalist quasi-religious cult that demanded total allegiance, obedience, and subservience.⁴ What is more, the Modern Movement claimed

to abolish 'style' by preventing any choice in the matter through the imposition of one single style (which it was at pains to claim was not a 'style' at all): this, however, consisted of little more than a small set of *clichés*, so its architectural language was impoverished, meaningless, and, ultimately, pathetically inadequate compared with the infinite riches to be found in Classicism.

* * *

Genius is as rare among architects as it is amongst the rest of us. This was also realised during the Georgian period (1714-1830), so pattern-books were made available, enabling those without much creative ability to design and erect buildings which did not offend or jar, fitted into contexts, and were at ease with themselves and with humanity.

I have in my possession a pocket-book, 4½ x 6 inches in size, entitled *The Builder's Jewel: or the Youth's Instructor, and Workman's Remembrancer explaining Short and Easy Rules, Made familiar to the meanest Capacity, for Drawing and Working* the various parts necessary to construct pleasant, harmonious buildings. By Batty (1696-1751) and Thomas (1702-c.1751) Langley, it was originally published in London in 1741, and went into numerous subsequent editions, one of the last of which was as late as 1808, in Edinburgh: it is crammed with beautiful engravings, setting out how to draw all sorts of Classical details as well as roof-trusses, timber floors, and so on. It demonstrates very clearly how and why any reasonably intelligent craftsman could get things right, for there existed a widely accepted, *coherent architectural language*, with its immensely sophisticated vocabulary, syntax, and grammar, splendid dictionaries for which were readily available (this one cost 4s. 6d. in 1763), and explains why so many 18th-century buildings are so pleasing.

Modernism ditched everything: there was no longer any great architectural language, for its vocabulary, grammar, syntax, and very meaning had been discarded: thereafter, only a few *clichés* were permitted, and eventually only visual mayhem was allowed. The world is dangerous, ugly, and vile, without adding to unease, alienation, distortion, and discomfort: but that is exactly what Modernism has achieved. It has been a puritanical, destructive, iconoclastic cult: it has imposed a new barbarism on the world.

If 'Le Corbusier' provided the vulgar sloganising in his appalling assertions leading 'towards an architecture' (the very title suggests there was none before his time),⁵ other writers were also guilty of gross misrepresentation; yet their works, also, have been accepted almost without a murmur, among them Pevsner's *An Outline of European Architecture*, which first appeared in 1943, and attempted (successfully, to judge from its critical acclaim and sales) to link the richly varied architecture of two millennia in

Europe to a highly selective sample of Modernist buildings approved of by the author, omitting everything that did not fit a preconceived programme, peered at myopically through *Bauhaus*-tinted spectacles.

Pevsner's pernicious *Pioneers of the Modern Movement from William Morris to Walter Gropius* (1936),⁶ was also highly selective to the point of distortion (as the title indicates all too clearly), and included individuals like Charles Francis Annesley Voysey (1857-1941) and Mackay Hugh Baillie Scott (1865-1945), who indignantly objected to being named as 'pioneers' of a movement they regarded as an abomination, not least because of its 'Godlessness'. Voysey told Pevsner that 'the new architecture cannot last. The architects have no religion. They have nothing exalted which they could try to approach; they are like designers who draw flowers and trees without remembering and honouring Him who created them'.⁷

Pevsner and others like him, however, knew better, and over-rode such scruples. Selectivity and exaggerated claims were essential elements of the 'Grand Narrative' of Modernism, and Pevsner was not the only one to employ them, although he was among the most influential. The blurb on the back of his *Pioneers* (1975 paperback edition) states that 'Voysey and Mackintosh⁸ in Britain were among the early masters of the Modern Movement. Louis Sullivan⁹ and Frank Lloyd Wright¹⁰ in America, the Sezession School, Adolf Loos¹¹ and Otto Wagner¹² in Vienna and, finally, Gropius and his Bauhaus colleagues perfected the style'. It is sobering to read Pevsner's *Foreword* to the third edition of *Pioneers* (1960): he stated that 'the main theses of, and the principal accents in' the book 'did not call for recantation or revision'.¹³ That is blinkeredness of the worst possible kind.

The wrapper of the 2005 edition of *Pioneers* was decorated with a reproduction of the *Acanthus* wallpaper (1875) designed by William Morris, but which never had any connection whatsoever at any level with the 'Modern Movement', no matter what Pevsner might desire or claim. Indeed, in an excellent volume entitled *The Arts and Crafts Movement*, the authors state that 'few now accept the view of Nikolaus Pevsner, put forward in his influential *Pioneers of the Modern Movement* (1936), of Arts and Crafts as an antecedent of modernism, to which it had contributed a functionalist and stripped-down aesthetic'.¹⁴ Quite so, but some of us were never among those who *ever* accepted such spurious connections at all, regarding them as not only ridiculous, but as deliberate distortions of anything resembling facts. Even then, the 2005 manifestation of Pevsner's *Pioneers* contained a new introduction by a Modernist professor at Cardiff University,¹⁵ and repeated the absurd claims as to the identity of so-called 'pioneers', but admitted that Gropius and his *Bauhaus* colleagues, rather than 'perfecting the style', made a 'radical break with the past'.¹⁶

Indeed they did, impoverishing us all: and in fact, with that statement, it is admitted there was NO continuity whatsoever with the past. So Pevsner's thesis is blown.

* * *

Revised and expanded editions of *Pioneers* accepted uncritically much of Pevsner's extraordinarily influential text. As Pevsner was driving towards his Modernist goal, picking out this individual here and that feature there, leaving the rest by the wayside, he did not bother to give

weight or substance to his story. The Arts-and-Crafts Movement, in fact, was the *opposite* of what Pevsner *claimed* it was. It is amazing that this book has been so widely accepted, and has been used to indoctrinate generations of students in beliefs that are pure fantasy. Pevsner claimed that the establishment of William Morris's firm in 1861 marked 'the beginning of a new era in Western art':¹⁷ thus he gave the impression of starting with a clean slate, as if nothing had gone before, yet the truth was that *the whole Arts-and-Crafts Movement grew from the Gothic Revival*.

The Arts-and-Crafts Movement was based on the ideal of making things by hand in small workshops, so was very different from the spirit of the Modern Movement, which enthusiastically embraced (and insisted upon) factory-made mass-production as the only way forward (not unconnected with the worship of the proletariat, a species much admired among trendy 'progressives'): this fact concerning actual Arts-and-Crafts beliefs and practices did not fit conveniently with Pevsner's Grand and Neat (too neat) Narrative of the *inevitable* Hegelian onward march of styles and movements. Where Pevsner used the term 'Historicism', Arts-and-Crafts protagonists referred affectionately to 'Old Work', which they often perceived as a catalyst or inspiration for design, yet the Modernist in Pevsner, seeking what he mistakenly thought was 'originality', refused to see it that way.

It is known that William Morris (1834-96) had a mercurial temperament, and was given to outbursts of rage (aspects that repelled the fastidious Voysey): if Morris had been able to read *Pioneers* he would have been incandescent, seeing that Pevsner's words destroyed most of what made life worth living, such as the beauty of the earth, the inspiration of past times, the sense that a human being can create, and so go on from day to day with dignity. If it is true, as Pevsner insisted, that a straight path leads from Morris to Gropius, something infinitely precious has got lost along the way.

In a breathtakingly dismissive sentence, Pevsner declared that for the first forty years of the 20th century 'no English names need ... be mentioned'¹⁸ in an architectural context. He ignored Sir Edwin Landseer Lutyens (1869-1944), Sir John Ninian Comper (1864-1960), Emanuel Vincent Harris (1876-1971), and other architects, some of whose works rose to great distinction. In the case of Comper, Pevsner went further: in his 'relentless campaign to establish the ideology of the International Modern Style, with its machine and functionalist aesthetic, as the architectural style of all time', he 'desired a clean break with the past', and 'achieved lasting damage to Comper's reputation by persuading his readers that his work was artistically and architecturally valueless'. Indeed, Pevsner 'rarely missed an opportunity to overlook or dismiss his work',¹⁹ labelling much of it as 'pretty-pretty-ness', and denouncing those who 'confound aesthetic with religious emotions'.²⁰ And there you have it: Voysey and Baillie Scott were right. Modernism is Godless, so deliberately divorces itself from the long tradition of European culture, rooted as it undoubtedly was (until recently) in religion.

One feels, rather ruefully as it happens, looking around some of the dystopian cityscapes created by Modernists, that a bit more 'pretty-pretty-ness' would not have gone amiss. In short, Pevsner, bogged down in that hoary old Germanic concept, the *Zeitgeist*, made connections and

links that were, quite simply, based on wishful thinking: no more than political agenda, they had hardly a tenuous relationship to facts, reality, or truth. They were called up as propaganda, to serve a cause, and an entirely unworthy one at that. That is not history, and it is shameful that so many historians have fallen for it.

1. Marc Perelman (2015): *Le Corbusier: une froide vision du monde* (Paris: Michalon Éditeur).
2. Maclair's articles appeared as 'L'Architecture va-t-elle mourir?' in *Le Figaro* (1933).
3. Nikolaus Pevsner (1960): *An Outline of European Architecture* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd.), 661.
4. James Stevens Curl (2018, 2019): *Making Dystopia: The Strange Rise and Survival of Architectural Barbarism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
5. Le Corbusier-Saunier (1923): *Vers une architecture* (Paris: Éditions G. Crès et Cie).
6. London: Faber & Faber Ltd., 1936.
7. Nikolaus Pevsner (1968): 'C.F.A. Voysey' in *Studies in Art, Architecture and Design* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd.), ii, 151.
8. Charles Rennie Mackintosh (1868-1928), Scots architect.
9. Louis Henri Sullivan (1856-1924), American architect of Irish-German descent.
10. Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959), American architect of Welsh descent.
11. Adolf Loos (1870-1933), Austrian architect.
12. Otto Colomann Wagner (1841-1918), Austrian architect.
13. But re-named as *Pioneers of Modern Design from William Morris to Walter Gropius* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1960).
14. Elizabeth Cumming & Wendy Kaplan (2002): *The Arts and Crafts Movement* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd.), 7.
15. It kept the revised title, *Pioneers of Modern Design from William Morris to Walter Gropius*, but added *revised and expanded* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2005).
16. *Ibid.*, even printed on the wrapper.
17. Nikolaus Pevsner (1936): *Pioneers of the Modern Movement from William Morris to Walter Gropius* (London: Faber & Faber Ltd.), 23.
18. Pevsner (1960), 646.
19. Anthony Symondson & Stephen Arthur Bucknall (2006): *Sir Ninian Comper: An introduction to his life and work with complete gazetteer* (Reading & London: Spire Books Ltd. & The Ecclesiological Society), 196.
20. *Ibid.*, 222.

R.A. Fisher at Gonville and Caius

A.W.F. EDWARDS

When in 1989 I proposed that one of the windows in the Hall of Gonville and Caius College might display stained-glass to commemorate two past Presidents of the College, John Venn and R.A. Fisher, the General Meeting of Fellows agreed; a Venn Diagram, and a Latin Square for Fisher copied from the dust-jacket of his book *The Design of Experiments*.



The Venn and Fisher windows reflected in the portrait of R.A. Fisher

There was no need for me to sing the praises of the two men. Venn, though long dead, was admired not just for his famous logic diagrams but for his devotion to the College, especially for his initiation of its *Biographical History*.

Fisher, who died in 1962, was still alive in the memories of many Fellows. Affectionate stories about him were still circulating. The Master, Peter Gray, was a scientist who knew him, as were six more of the Fellows who were also FRS and who understood his achievements. Joan Box's wonderful biography of her father *R.A. Fisher: The Life of a Scientist* (1978) was in the College library, as were all Fisher's books and his *Collected Papers* edited by a former Fellow, J.H. Bennett.

To non-scientists Fisher is not so well known. His work is difficult and his writing terse. They may read that Fisher was 'a genius who almost single-handedly created the foundations for modern statistical science' (Anders Hald) and that he was 'Darwin's greatest successor' (Richard Dawkins) but they don't know why. Nor why the recent Fisher Memorial Lecturer (the 41st) Bill Rosenberger 'put Fisher in the company of Darwin, Newton, Gauss, Einstein, Madame Curie'. In medicine the introduction of Fisher's design of experiments (which the window celebrates) parallels Curie's discovery of radium.

In June 2020 the Council of Caius College took the Fisher window down in response to a student protest con-

nected with the Black Lives Matter movement. The trouble had started in the United States with Fisher being stigmatized as a 'eugenicist'¹. After World War II it became a word of opprobrium, with three different meanings in relation to English, US and German pre-war developments.

In England discussion mostly took place within the Eugenics Society and published in its *Eugenics Review*. Lobbying of Parliament led to no legislation. In the United States eugenics legislation was introduced in many States and included compulsory sterilization. This then became the model for German eugenics, with legislation in 1933 when the Nazi Party took power. Thus tainted, 'eugenicist' has now become a word of abuse akin to 'racist', freely deployed as an alternative to reasoned discussion, as in the Caius student petition for the removal of the window.

On 12 June 2020 at 16:36 the Master of Caius sent a letter to all Fellows referring to a student petition. 'The Tutors are working with the student representatives to bring a paper in relation to the RA Fisher window for decision to the College Council on 24th June. This will be circulated to the fellowship in good time before that meeting. Those who wish to support it may do so. Those who disagree should send their own paper(s) to the College Council, by 4 p.m. 19th June' (a Friday).

At 17.15 on Tuesday 16 June this second letter arrived, 'prepared by' the Senior Tutor and President, etc., of the Student Union. It was a highly-tendentious rant against Fisher, as was the student petition, proposing the removal of both the window and the portrait of Fisher from the Hall. 'Fisher's views on race and eugenics influenced both his scientific work and his public pronouncements' (evidence? 'A paper in the *New Scientist* in 1978').

In an accompanying letter the Senior Tutor announced 'There are many in College who will know and understand Fisher's work, view and legacy far better than I do'. But had they been consulted?

Two working days were allowed for a response. Here is mine:

'I write in accordance with the Master's circular to Fellows dated 12 June as one who disagrees with the paper prepared by the Senior Tutor, the GCSU President, the GCSU Vice-President, the GCSU BME Officer and the GCSU Welfare Officers. I disagree with its first two proposals insofar as they affect the Sir Ronald Fisher Window. I disagree with each and every paragraph in the section The Problem with the Window and in particular with the misquoting of material from The Race Concept, UNESCO, Paris, 1952, p.27 (given without reference).

My solution to the The Problem with the Window lies in Education, Learning and Research. My long academic career has been devoted to two main areas, Statistics, in particular statistical inference, and Genetics, in particular evolutionary biology and human diversity. In these fields R.A. Fisher is the towering figure. I have lectured and written extensively on them, and in particular on their overlap. Yet I have not been approached by the Master, or the Senior Tutor, or any Tutor of a concerned student, or any student of his or her own volition, to answer any questions that fall within my professional competence. Nor has time been given to respond to the letter prepared by the Senior Tutor et. al. at an appropriate level. I would like to emphasise that I continue to be very willing to speak to any Fellow or student who has interest in or concerns about Fisher in any aspects of his work.'

Some of the responses sent to the Council by other Fellows were later among the papers for a General Meeting of Fellows. They included serious objections to the procedure adopted by the Master, and the observation that the decision was not a matter for the Council but for the Fellows at a GM. 51 Fellows signed the Senior Tutor's letter, though no Council members did but him. It was claimed that this was a majority, but in fact 56 did *not* sign. Some others who were not members of the Governing Body were also invited to sign, even Honorary Fellows (of whom three did) and a Lector.

One ray of sunshine was a letter sent to me personally on the eve of the Council meeting by the President of the student Natural Science Society on behalf of the Committee and signed by all its members. It was eloquent, informed and courteous, arguing for the removal of the window. It put to shame the tone of both the Senior Tutor's letter and the student petition. I entered into a rewarding e-mail exchange of opinion with its author, and was glad to meet her later when she continued for a PhD.

After the deadline on 19 June rumours started circulating of a forthcoming LATE PAPER for the Council meeting due on Wednesday afternoon, 24 June. It was alleged to contain devastating further information incriminating Fisher. Council members received it on Tuesday morning, leaving them one-and-a-half days to consider and check its statements. That afternoon at 14.09 the Master's Secretary circulated the paper to all Fellows with a covering note from Professor Vic Gatrell (Fellow) 'Please find attached some information from myself and Prof Sir Richard Evans regarding R.A. Fisher and eugenics'. Sir Richard, Emeritus Regius Professor of History, is an Honorary Fellow and an authority on Nazi Germany. The letter was dated 20 June and addressed to the Master.

The paper was indeed devastating – superficially. The Council minuted that a discussion was held, noted the support for the Senior Tutor's proposals, and decided to remove the Fisher window subject to listed-building consent (which in the event was deemed by the planning officer not even to require consideration. The Hall is Grade 1). The Gatrell–Evans paper stated 'There is some evidence that [Fisher] took a favourable view of Nazi eugenics'.

The Council did not stop to think 'Can that be true? Ought we not to seek some further opinions for such a devastating statement?' Two days later it issued a press notice starting 'The College Council after serious and considered discussion decided on Wednesday 24 June to take down the R.A. Fisher window'. (I later wrote a paper³ for the College Council giving evidence that the statement '[Fisher's] interest in eugenics stimulated his interest in both statistics and genetics' was false, and asked them to withdraw it, which they agreed to do).

The Gatrell–Evans paper was tendentious in the extreme. It started with a very damaging statement: 'In the mid-1930s Fisher campaigned for the legalization of compulsory eugenic sterilization'. I knew that to be false and could have quoted Fisher's written statement opposing it from memory had the Council invited me. The paper continued 'and was a coauthor of the Brock Report calling for this'. The Report did nothing of the sort.

But it was the next section which must have really alarmed the Council. In 1948 Fisher, along with many other distinguished scientists, including in England Lord Adrian and L.S. Penrose, were asked to give opinions on

the German human geneticist Otmar von Verschuer, who shared Fisher's interest in the genetics of twinning. He was seeking post-war employment after having been let off lightly at his 'denazification' hearing. In this he was successful, becoming Professor of Human Genetics at the University of Münster. Much later, historians began to uncover von Verschuer's Nazi past and his wartime activities of which there is no doubt. But there is no evidence that Fisher (or Adrian) knew of these in 1948. Fisher did remark in a letter to von Verschuer in that year 'There has evidently been a good deal of denigration, which I do not believe has any substantial basis', as if he did not want to let political questions invade their friendly academic correspondence which had started before the war.

The Gatrell-Evans paper said 'The denigration to which Fisher referred was publicity given to close collaboration with [Josef] Mengele'. When I asked 'What is the evidence for this' Evans replied 'The claim that Fisher was not aware of Verschuer's collaboration with Mengele is not credible'. In 1948? Evidence? None. In the same reply, Evans also wrote 'Of Fisher's support for compulsory sterilization there is no doubt'. Evidence? Fisher's written statement opposing it (mentioned above) is 1926. But Evans did admit he was wrong about the Brock Report. Fisher's correspondence with von Verschuer is in his archive in Adelaide and contains no suggestion that he knew of von Verschuer's connection with the notorious Josef Mengele.

In Fisher's letter giving his opinion of von Verschuer he wrote that his 'reputation stood exceedingly high among human geneticists before we had heard of Adolph [sic] Hitler'. He then referred to what is called 'negative eugenics', that is, genetic counselling with a view to reducing the frequency of deleterious genes in future populations known to cause disease. Of the means to do this, birth control and voluntary sterilization are the most obvious, and, as Fisher put it to his Cambridge undergraduate friend C.S. Stock in 1932 'anything so big as eugenic aims must be controlled by the personal choice of individuals acquainted with their own individual needs and circumstances'.

Fisher's letter continued 'In spite of their prejudices I have no doubt also that the [Nazi] Party sincerely wished to benefit the German racial stock, especially by the elimination of manifest defectives, such as those deficient mentally, and I do not doubt that von Verschuer gave, as I should have done, his support to such a movement'. This statement taken literally suggests that Fisher supported the elimination of 'manifest defectives' themselves, as was quickly pointed out to me by a Council member who asked my opinion on the eve of the meeting. As one familiar with human genetics and indeed the early literature of the subject I saw immediately that it was an unfortunate phrasing and that it was the *causative genes* that were referred to as being eliminated, and not their carriers. It was eugenics and not murder. But to historians steeped in Nazi methods such practices were not unfamiliar. The damage was done: the word *Nazi* had been introduced into the

Fisher window debate. The Caius Council did not stop for advice.

My interpretation³ has been accepted by all the geneticists I have consulted. No-one who might have wished to challenge it has done so except one, who accused me of sophistry. No guesses who.

Richard Evans went public with his attack in the *New Statesman* on 28 July 2020 with an article entitled *R.A. Fisher and the science of hatred: The great statistician was also a racist who believed in the forced sterilization of those he considered inferior*⁴. The word *forced* was removed from the digital copy on 14 August along with the word *compulsory* from the text. He has also since agreed that his statement that Fisher estimated 17 per cent of the British population were "defectives" was a misunderstanding. The charge that Fisher was a racist has been challenged by a dozen senior Fellows of Caius including a former Master and two former Presidents⁵.

Where is the Fisher window now? Entombed in a box in the archives. The College has got its trophy, though not its intention to display it in a prominent place elsewhere in the College (the stocks?) with a 'contextualising' notice beside it, to be drafted by historians no doubt. It is time for the Council to reconsider its decision in the face of the accurate information now available. It has spent four years deflecting all criticism of its action from within the Fellowship; it has not been listening to the petitions of senior alumni, many of whom knew Fisher well; and it is oblivious of the criticism of individual scientists worldwide who were unable to stop their professional associations from spreading false information about Fisher. (Happily neither the Royal Statistical Society nor the Genetics Society of Great Britain joined in, both of which had had Fisher as President.)

And the College has been insensitive to the feelings of Fisher's elderly children, four of whom were alive in 2020. Joan Box and her sister Liza died earlier this year; Rose and June remain. Rose once said to me 'Father was a man of his time', and I thought silently, 'No, he was a man ahead of his time'. In 1999 W.D. Hamilton, who died the following year, wrote 'In some ways some of us have overtaken Fisher; in many, however, this brilliant, daring man is still far in front'.

1. <https://thecritic.co.uk/issues/march-2021/cancelled-by-his-college/>

2. <https://doi.org/10.17863/CAM.96853>

3. <https://historyreclaimed.co.uk/r-a-fishers-comment-on-otmar-von-verschuer-in-1948-an-explanation/>

4. <https://historyreclaimed.co.uk/statement-on-sir-ronald-a-fisher/>

5. <https://www.newstatesman.com/long-reads/2020/07/ra-fisher-and-science-hatred>

6. See also: <https://www.cai.cam.ac.uk/news/interview-professor-anthony-edwards-ra-fisher>

Dysmorphia

A poem should be martyred to itself,
flayed of imprecision, all consumed,
and staked upon a high-built pyre
of the mundane, whose smoked breath reaches heaven.
Language, though, accrues upon the dermis,
not licking it to immediate fineness,
but muffling with many-layered films
the bone and gut, insulation from the shock
of contact: a stubborn flab of allegory
only to be shifted by formal starvation.
Yet could a sonnet balance on its iambs
cellulitic legs, taut with argument,
but eloquent in fat: rippling the disturbance
of their own weight on earth, walking to me?

ISOBEL FALK

Isobel Falk is an Anglo-Canadian writer based in London. She is interested in queerness, cinema, and the Gothic. She is a graduate of Oxford University and a recipient of the Tower Poetry Prize.

True Crime

A man cuts a hole at the end of the street with an axe,
kills a woman. So how did you two get talking. Well in
the public lecture, full of cold rain, I burst out
bleeding. Then they took me downstairs where the answer
was. I've only ever seen that black water once, from
an airplane. It was now. It was at the forefront of the pulpit
information. Something wanting, another gives. My cousin
gave us an empty silver frame. I speared my finger
on its shining blade by the light of the lamp. The desk
only has one edge. The next day we had soup. I threw
my plate right back where it belongs. The former tenant
was always in it for the blood. You remembered
the parable of the snail. Now we're just in a spiral, tawning.
We are waiting for the fall of the axe.

Reverdie During The War

The sun becomes a manual for thinking.
This I call the sun: the potential
of hot water thickening the blood, and gravy,
and causing the thermos' collapse which,
like a stain, makes the assembly of piled things intelligible.

A foolish and old lover raised goats
and I see him killing them with background bells.
On the red ground it is time,
it is a miracle.

A red slender candle is sitting in foil.
I am hearing the hail from below, like always.
The woman in the portrait pulls up her brooch
where a red rainbow herald fortunes her shoulder.
No skylight, no varnish. Then steam, undamaged.

Subhuti Under The Blossoms

after Shitou Xiqian

This is the place
where it is done. A teacher's
mind goes out over the field
unwilling to speak or find
by speaking the ligature
and hose of the written life
by which the difference

between identical things is made
here: this spring where everything is
never real, phenomenally true,
caught in the damp closeness
of pine needles speaking
in original compassion
so we might not feel the coming rain

SHAW WORTH

Shaw Worth is reading English at Magdalen College, where he edits poetry for the Oxford Review of Books. He was a three-time Foyle Young Poet of the Year, runner-up and shortlisted in the 2022 Oxford Brookes International Poetry Competition, and longlisted in the 2023 National Poetry Competition; he has just been awarded the 2024 Newdigate Prize. His work has appeared variously online, in print, and on the stage.

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Scrutiny of university governance

G.R.EVANS

The Office for Students loosely defines acceptable governance arrangements. Those stipulate that a higher education provider must ‘have in place adequate and effective management and governance arrangements’ to ‘operate in accordance with its governing documents’ and those must ensure that ‘the size, composition, diversity, skills mix, and terms of office of the governing body is appropriate for the nature, scale and complexity of the provider’.

The Committee of University Chairs (CUC) provides its own model *Code of Governance*, in which requirements are defined in more detail. In its view a governing body, ‘working with the Executive’, is ‘collectively responsible and accountable for institutional activities, approving all final decisions on matters of fundamental concern within its remit’.¹ Having no Chair, neither Oxford nor Cambridge belongs to the CUC, but the CUC’s membership includes all the publicly-funded universities throughout the UK and a few of the private ‘alternative providers’. Its *Code of Governance* therefore has to cover a range of constitutionally enforceable decision-making arrangements.

The *Education Reform Act* (1988) laid down ground-rules for then-existing universities. Those were maintained under the *Further and Higher Education Act* (1992)² and are still in force. A university’s governing body is to be a Council, Board or equivalent, made up of a couple of dozen, who will form the ‘corporation’.³ Up to thirteen of these may be ‘independent’ (external) persons appointed for their competence in ‘industrial, commercial or employment matters or the practice of any profession’. No more than two were to be academic staff and no more than two were to be students. A co-opted member must have ‘experience in the provision of education’. These requirements place ultimate decision-making power in a very few hands.

In addition to the ‘governing-body’ Council there is in practice commonly also a more democratic Senate or Academic Board whose composition varies but may include academic and academic-related staff and perhaps students. The powers of such bodies to make decisions are limited and final decisions lie with their governing bodies. At Cranfield University, for example, the Senate ‘has authority delegated by Council to oversee the academic work of the University’.⁴

The Universities of Oxford and Cambridge stand apart among UK universities in the degree of democracy they preserve in their decision-making. However both Oxford and Cambridge have responded to internal calls for review of their governance in recent decades, Cambridge through its Wass Syndicate in 1988-9,⁵ Oxford through its North Commission of Inquiry a few years later.⁶ Both reviews resulted in the appointment of salaried Vice-Chancellors including candidates from outside the University, replacing the recent tradition which had been to choose a Head of House. The first new-style Vice-Chancellors began to press for governance reform. Alec Broers (1996-2003), expressed considerable annoyance over the work-

ings of Cambridge’s democracy. As he put it indignantly in his Annual Address in October 2002, ‘the decisions of the Council can be questioned and a ballot called by a group of unelected members half the size of the elected Council’.⁷ The CAPSA crisis over a failed new accounting system prompted calls for change. In June 2002 *A Report of the Council on governance*,⁸ sought ‘explicit statutory definition of the Vice-Chancellor as the University’s principal academic and administrative officer’. It also called for the Council to include three external members. The Regent House accepted some change but protected its role as governing body.

John Hood was appointed from New Zealand as Oxford’s first ‘outsider’ Vice-Chancellor in 2004. He began at once on an attempt to bring the governance of Oxford into line with the norms in other UK universities, calling for a small governing body, including external members, meeting at most half a dozen times a year.⁹ A series of ensuing debates and voting resulted in a decisive defeat for the proposals in November 2006. In his Oration of 2007, Hood commented crossly that ‘Academic freedom, like democracy itself, can be a messy and painful business’.¹⁰

These episodes seem to have discouraged further active attempts to change the governance of Oxford or Cambridge.

Varieties of governance among higher education providers

There is no Regulator for higher education governance beyond the partial oversight of the Office for Students. The fundamental institutional autonomy of English universities is comprehensively asserted in the *Higher Education and Research Act* (2017). It indisputably covers academic freedoms and other areas of autonomy already established in English law, but it does not grapple with governance structures in detail.

Neither Oxford nor Cambridge was established by royal charter;¹¹ they simply established themselves as corporations (*universitates*) and from the beginning they have created and amended their own statutes, allowing them to decide how to make decisions binding on their University. Oxford’s Statute IX lists its Vice-Chancellor, Registrar and others as its Officers, Statute IV the membership and powers of Congregation. Cambridge’s Statute C lists its Vice-Chancellor, Registrar and others as its Officers, Statute A, the membership and powers of the Regent House.

Universities established by royal charter have statutes stated in or derived from their charters. For example, the charter of the University of Exeter sets out the actions it is empowered to take, and defines the authorities of the University as ‘the Council, the Senate, the Education Board and Postgraduate Research Board, and such other bodies as may be prescribed by Statute or Ordinance as the case

may be'. It creates a Vice-Chancellorship and allows its alumni 'the right to represent their views to the University as provided for in the Statutes and Ordinances', laying the ground for a Senate or something of the sort. The charter permits the University to 'make new or additional Statutes or alter, amend or repeal existing Statutes'.¹²

When former polytechnics became universities the *Further and Higher Education Act* (1992), s.71 Act provided for each to have an Instrument of Government approved by the Privy Council:

'Every document purporting to be an instrument made or issued by or on behalf of a higher education corporation for which an instrument of government has effect and to be duly executed under the seal of the corporation, or to be signed or executed by a person authorised by the corporation to act in that behalf, shall be received in evidence and be treated, without further proof, as being so made or issued unless the contrary is shown.'

Oxford Brookes, a post-1992 university, explains that 'responsibility for the day-to-day running of Oxford Brookes University rests with the Vice-Chancellor' and 'the Vice-Chancellor's Group' while the Board of Governors leads the University strategically by determining the overall mission.¹³

Universities with origins as higher education corporations, such as Leeds Beckett University, also have an Instrument and Articles of Government.¹⁴ Changes to those 'can be made via resolution of a Board of Governors'.¹⁵ Its Academic Board can establish committees and 'regularly' advise 'the Vice Chancellor and the Board of Governors on academic matters'.¹⁶

Privately funded 'alternative' providers (for-profit and not-for-profit) have recently been multiplying under Government encouragement. To remain on its Register, they must fulfil the registration conditions of the Office for Students. Nevertheless they may make their own arrangements, subject to such governance elements as the Office for Students requires if they wish to be on its Register. Accordingly BPP University explains that it 'has a specific structure of governance that supports its effective functioning as an academic institution and in line with its regulatory responsibilities.' It has an 'overarching structure of governance' including as the governing body a University Board of Directors, consisting of 'three Non-Executive Directors and six Executive Directors'. Its Articles of Association include a Memorandum of Understanding between BPP Holdings (the parent company) and BPP University.¹⁷ The international SAE Education Limited publishes its 'provider submission' to the Office for Students. This explains that the 'Governance of SAE Institute is managed through an external Board of Directors, while the highest academic governance is the Academic Board, composed of external membership drawn primarily from UK Higher Education'.¹⁸

The 'Halpin' reviews of university governance

The climate of expansion is encouraging quite an industry in 'reviews' of university governance. The Halpin Partnership, which seems to have cornered the market, describes itself as 'a boutique management consultancy',¹⁹ counting '107 happy clients'.²⁰ Halpin has been responsible for governance reviews of a number of universities, including

Bath, East Anglia, Manchester, Imperial, Sussex and UCL. It launched itself in a few years ago, classifying itself to Companies House as providing 'business support service activities not elsewhere classified'. It may be found in the Directory of Tertiary Education Consultants (DTEC)²¹, 'a free resource for further and higher education providers and the organisations that work with them'. DTEC, created in 2020, is run on a not-for-profit basis. Would-be additions may apply to be listed, filling in an application form on which they write their own description for publication under their names. Halpin describes itself there as 'a fresh approach to management consultancy' which 'delivers smart projects, reviews and assessments across fundraising, governance, marketing and strategy'. It says that 'Halpin Consultants and Consulting Fellows are recognised senior leaders in their fields. They have 'boots on the ground' experience and a blend of proven results across higher education and beyond'.²²

Halpin has become the go-to provider for reviews. It acted as 'partner' to UKRI on *Responding to International Humanitarian Crises*, reporting in September 2023, funded as part of a £5m grant from Research England.²³ Examples show a consistent pattern of conducting the reviews of individual higher education providers and a range of outcomes. 'Following an open and competitive procurement process,' it was appointed by the University of Bath in November 2017'.²⁴ The *Review* was completed in 2018, with a slide 'Presentation' to its Council on 24 May as well as publication of the full outcome. The Council was informed that there were '15 primary recommendations and 55 supporting recommendations'. The University could be 'considered compliant in terms of the current sector guidance' but the 'application' of its 'model of governance' required 'considerable improvement'.²⁵

In 2023 the University of Buckingham invited an 'effectiveness review' of itself by Halpin.²⁶ Buckingham had begun in the 1970s as a 'University College'. It became a University by royal charter in 1983, giving it the powers to create its own statutes. Its distinctive offer to prospective students lay in the provision of two-year degree courses (achieved by abandoning 'Long Vacations').²⁷ The bulk of the findings of this *Halpin Review* related to fundamental matters of its governance. It found that many roles including those of 'Senate representatives on Council' were not well understood. 'Professional Services' were permitted to be members of Council but there was currently only one such representative. Halpin recommended two, 'to encourage parity amongst representatives'. 'Independent members' were not certain to be in the majority, and Halpin suggested 'the recruitment of further independent governors'. There was an 'alumni representative' but based in Tanzania and therefore 'fairly isolated' and needing 'more engagement with Council'.

Halpin wanted University of Buckingham Council members to be taught their job and helped to understand the style in which they should conduct themselves. There was uncertainty as to 'how all the University's committees link up together'. An organogram of committee structures, data on how committees relate to one another and terms of reference were 'available online in the Governance Handbook' but that, said Halpin, needed to be spelt out in the 'induction for new Council, Senate and Executive members'. Halpin suggested 'that the Council, the Executive and the Director of Fundraising undertake training together to ensure that everyone is up

to date with UK law and HE regulatory requirements'. It was reported that 'members of Council had allegedly placed unreasonable pressure on senior staff and engaged in treatment which witnesses found uncomfortable', but 'there appeared to be no structure or methods within the University for dealing with such situations'.

A first fruit of Buckingham's attempts to put the *Halpin Review*'s recommendations into action was a new Scheme of Delegation, which took effect from 1 March 2024.²⁸ That seeks 'to identify the responsibilities and delegated authority for making key decisions in the name of, or on behalf of, the University of Buckingham'. Interviewees had suggested that decisions were sometimes taken outside meetings or 'hidden'; that 'senior leaders' failed to consult except amongst 'close colleagues'; that accountability became unclear when it was not recognised that a mere suggestion in a conversation had been taken to be a decision. Too great a willingness to seek consensus was criticised as potentially 'slowing down the implementation of urgent action'. Under the CUC Code, part of Council's role is to have oversight of the University's culture and Buckingham was 'to ensure that this remains healthy'. Halpin recommended the creation of a Code of Conduct for Buckingham's Council, to include a register of the interests of members of Council and 'Senior Executives'.

By contrast, the University of Manchester, reviewed in 2021²⁹ (after a previous review conducted in 2017), was found to be doing well, with its 'governance arrangements', 'good and effective with some areas of leading-edge practice'. The Governance Office and Secretariat Support Team were considered 'strong' and the 'Annual Accountability Review process' was rated as 'sector-leading'.

Outsourcing of responsibility

As in so many areas of modern societies *Halpin Reviews* can be seen as mechanisms for abrogation of responsibility by bodies where responsibility for governance primarily resides, whether it be the Council of a given provider or the Office for Students. The Office for Students can only refuse to Register universities and other HE providers which fail to comply with its limited governance requirements. But should Halpin advice to providers be quite so confidently sought when Halpin appears to have so few competitors and remains itself unregulated?

1. <https://www.universitychairs.ac.uk/wp-content/files/2018/06/CUC-HE-Code-of-Governance-publication-final.pdf>

2. Schedule 6

3. *Further and Higher Education Act* (1992) Schedule 6, updating Schedule 7 of *Education Reform Act* (1988).

4. <https://www.cranfield.ac.uk/about/governance-and-policies/council-and-senate>.

5. <https://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/university-archives/glossary/wass-syndicate>

6. <https://governance.admin.ox.ac.uk/north-commission-of-inquiry>

7. *Reporter* (9 October, 2002).

8. *Reporter* (26 June, 2002)

9. *Oxford University Gazette, Supplement* *III (March, 2005)

10. *Gazette, Supplement* (3), (3 October 2007).

11. Though Cambridge was given one by Henry III in 1231.

12. <https://www.exeter.ac.uk/staff/policies/calendar/part1/charter/>

13. <https://www.brookes.ac.uk/about-brookes/structure-and-governance>.

14. <https://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/-/media/files/our-university/governance/instrument-of-government.pdf>

15. <https://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/our-university/governance/>

16. <https://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/our-university/governance/academic-board/>

17. <https://www.bpp.com/about-bpp/bpp-university/governance>

18. <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/ibknahlz/sae-education-limited-tef-2023-provider-submission.pdf>

19. <https://halpinpartnership.com/#>

20. <https://halpinpartnership.com/about/>

21. <https://www.dtec.org.uk/>

22. <https://www.dtec.org.uk/halpin-partnership-ltd/>

23. <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/universities-uk-international/insights-and-publications/uuki-publications/lessons-uk-higher-education-sector>

24. <https://www.dtec.org.uk/halpin-partnership-ltd/>

25. <https://www.bath.ac.uk/publications/the-halpin-review/attachments/halpin-review-24-may-2018-presentation.pdf>

26. <https://halpinpartnership.com/>

27. <https://www.buckingham.ac.uk/about/history>

28. <https://www.buckingham.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/2024-UOB-SoD.pdf>

29. <https://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=56172>

Too polite for racists?

– the US/UK dichotomy of racism in the University

AISSA DEARING

The Great Fire of the 2020 Black Lives Matter movement has settled. In its ashes, we see more Equality and Diversity officers in universities worldwide, universities explicitly calling for diverse applicants, and attempts to address racial equity gaps in pre-university educational programming. Tacitly, we've all agreed there is still racism in both the US and the UK but pretend that racists are no longer tolerable. In conversation Danny Dorling, Professor of Geography at the University of Oxford, remarked: "To be called racist in Britain is like being uninvited to the dinner party." It feels as though it's now more disrespectful to call someone a racist than to be racist in Britain.

To a woman of colour who grew up in the US South and is now studying at Oxford, it seems that engagement with Britain's layers of racism is only possible behind a cloak of civility. Essayist Mark Brown wrote in *Britain's Black Power Movement is at Risk of Being Forgotten* that the culture around politeness is a "narrative.... that Britain is the utopia of fair play. We have such a commitment to common sense and decency that there is no systematic racism in Britain." To talk about or even suggest that an element of racism remains is to be confrontational, or ill-mannered. In my own experience at the University of Oxford I have witnessed academics promoting pro-colonial rhetorics, which have had a real and lasting impact on the psyche of students of colour.

I have been accused of 'bringing American conceptions of racism' to British shores and called an 'American leftist radical' trying to disrupt Oxford tradition. I've been told by teaching staff that they do not know much about 'black things or black people...' and therefore cannot support me in my studies on Black geographies. When trying to engage in dialogue with my peers on issues of this nature, I am often met with racist jokes, name-calling, and even harassment. In reporting incidents of racial abuse of this kind, I've been told that incidents of this nature are not racist but how a British university operates.

In trying to teach my peers more about how British colonial histories reverberate around the world, I have been branded rude and aggressive. Here is where more covert forms of racism are allowed to fester – but can be uncovered with a more direct engagement of the nature of race and racism in the UK.

* * *

I find it significant and persuasive that the way the world thinks about race and racism has been shaped by American cultural hegemony. In *This is Not America* cultural critic Tomiwa Owolade argues that Britons should understand race from the British perspective rather than adopt America's battles. Here, racism is thought of as a notion exported to British shores. American conceptions of race materialize in Britain as "reducing Black people

to their race... which acquiesces to the vision of racists." In many ways, Owolade's argument makes sense. British racism developed in a largely different context; therefore, the language and actions that Americans have adopted to wrestle with racism don't exactly translate. The British can claim heritage on their land for thousands of years, while Americans must approach the issue of race with humility because of the history of migration. Britons look upon the US with simultaneous pity and relief. When watching African Americans getting racially abused at US universities, the first thought of a Briton is that something like that could never happen on British soil.

Partially, that's true. Unlike the UK, the legacy of race and racism very much happened on blood-soaked US soil. One born from the other, the US used the strategies of empire – including racial categorization – learned from the mother country to develop its unique settler colonial project. Though both empires facilitated the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, the varying destinations of the kidnapped Africans and the differing natures of the colonial project shaped the very different development of racialised contexts. The US was a settler home-making project, where Indigenous genocide and enslavement of Africans happened in the same place, on the same land. A violent racist history was necessary for the creation of the US, as white people did not want to be regarded as strangers or, worse, immigrants on "their" land. Indigenous communities were murdered, assimilated, or pushed onto reservations, while African Americans were considered 3/5ths of a human to fit into the idea of the new nation.

In British colonies in the Caribbean, home-making was not the eventual goal – it was simply to extract as much labour power and natural resources as possible for the motherland's development. This crucial context made legal cases like the formerly enslaved Joseph's Knight push for freedom possible, as slavery on British soil was negligible in comparison to the colonies. Unlike in Britain, having 'free' territory in the US drastically affected the bottom line, allowing enslaved people to escape to a free North. This led to the decision of Dred Scot v. Sanford, where the courts found that formerly enslaved people could never be US citizens, and the 'recapturing' of enslaved people in the North was permitted. While Britain eventually held home-making colonies in the Caribbean, India, and across Sub-Saharan Africa, Indigenous peoples in the colonies were regarded as the periphery of the empire.

Though racial discrimination in UK was not always codified in law like in the Jim Crow American South after formal enslavement, it was not illegal to discriminate in public places in 20th century Britain. There was systematic denial of service to people of colour in pubs, restaurants, and hotels. Local councils underfunded communities where people of colour lived. As British

scholar on race Dr. Kehinde Andrews highlights in *Britain's Civil Rights History*, it is often overshadowed by the four-month Bristol Bus Boycott, which took place because Black and Asian people were not allowed to drive Bristol's public buses. British sociologist Gurinder Bhambra noted that a *quid-pro-quo* took place between people of colour already in Britain and those outside the colonies: to prevent further legal racial discrimination inside the motherland.

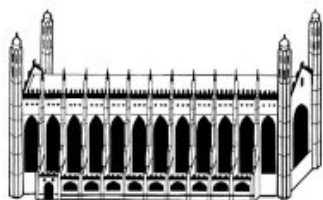
Parliament adopted the Race Relations Acts of 1965 and 1968, which outlawed discrimination in public places, whilst passing a series of Commonwealth Immigration Acts, slowing 'outsiders' from immigrating to the motherland. Yet, we see the Windrush generation from the Commonwealth territories (most prominently Jamaica, India, Pakistan, Kenya and South Africa) being brought over to Britain to help rebuild after World War Two in exchange for the promise of citizenship. This promise comes to a head in the 21st century, where Windrush migrants who have established homes, families, and livelihoods in the UK are threatened with deportation (and in some cases, deported) when stricter immigration policies find no record of their migration status. While there have since been apologies, inquiries, and the formation of the Windrush Compensation Scheme, there are similar iterations of racist immigration policy as can be seen with the passage of the Rwanda Bill, that deports 'illegal' asylum seekers to Rwanda, regardless of their nation of origin.

Students and staff at Oxford have lined up to tell me that systemic racism does not exist in the UK: class is the defining socioeconomic strata of Britain, not race. It's crucial here to remember that the category of class is

not politically neutral or objective, it's granted legitimacy through the evasion of the intersectional experiences of race, gender, and sexuality.

In this context, it's hard not to draw upon American wisdom to understand British racism. Andrews noted that race scholars in the UK have had to fight for recognition in the realm of Black geographies, leaning upon scholars in the US where this work is funded. Paul Gilroy, in his book *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, utilized the concept of double consciousness, a term coined by American sociologist W.E.B Du Bois to situate the complexities of Black identity and culture in the diaspora, emphasizing the need to embrace the multifaceted nature of Black experiences. This perspective has influenced racial scholarship and discourse in the UK, demonstrating the interconnectedness of racial struggles on both sides of the Atlantic.

It's clear to me that with this deep history of racialisation, migration, and empire, Britain's racism is not a mere export of American struggles but a complex issue deserving of its own reckoning. As Britain continues to grapple with its colonial legacy, it's crucial to engage in open and honest discussions about the racial challenges faced by various racialised communities. To achieve meaningful progress in the fight against racism, it's necessary to challenge denial and to recognize that it is no longer enough to plead politeness and civility. Confronting the covert forms of racism that persist in Britain requires direct engagement with the nature of race and racism in this country. While the American model may not perfectly fit the British context, the broader themes of racial inequity, discrimination, and injustice are universal.



Notes from Cambridge

The Vice-Chancellor's letter to Oxford Brookes staff, published in *Reminders* in the Second Week Magazine, describes a shift to compulsory severance there after a 'voluntary severance scheme' failed to produce the savings the University needed. A 'compulsory redundancy' process looms, but first voluntary severance is to be tried once more, adding 'additional academic areas' and closing Music and Mathematics.

Cambridge has felt sufficiently financially insecure enough in the past to try 'voluntary retirement'. An invitation in 1999 prompted 166 volunteers, of whom 91 were offered early retirement as 'in the managerial interests of the University' and 79 'accepted the offer made to them'. There was a requirement that the retiree's post would be 'permanently suppressed or an equivalent recurrent saving achieved elsewhere'. An extension of the scheme to attract more volunteers removed even the requirement that there must be a resulting saving in expenditure.

From 2010 Cambridge planned to offer 'voluntary severance' once more. At that time it was found that 'around half of supported applications' came from staff in the Uni-

fied Administrative Service. That too, though expensive in terms of compensation, produced some modest savings as measured in 2014.

In the absence of Oxford-style conjoint appointments the capture of a University Teaching Officer (UTO) is a considerable prize for a Cambridge College. The 'UTO Scheme' under which Colleges are given guidance in procuring one stresses that a 'UTO Fellow should be regarded as a permanent educational resource for a College',¹ providing a direct link with the University. However, under a Special Ordinance² Cambridge's University Officers, alone amongst all its employees, must retire just before they are 67. This is Cambridge's counterpart to Oxford's Employer Justified Retirement Age.

The EJRA is not strictly 'severance' because the Office is established and remains in existence to be filled by its next holder. This is currently prompting claims that abolishing Cambridge's EJRA – as proposed by a group of concerned senior academics – would damage the prospects of the young academics who may aspire to a University Teaching Office themselves.

On 24 January 2023 a Topic of Concern Discussion was held on 'Forced Retirement'.³ It attracted many contributors who set out arguments which remain actively in play. A *Review* group was set up by the Council. That has now reported, and it was agreed by the Council in February that its findings should be published, with a *Report* in May and a ballot of the Regent House in June (in time to affect those due for retirement in September).⁴ However it does not recommend abolition, only a raising of the age of forced retirement by a year or two and the removal of the academic-related Officers from the EJRA.

Protesters against the EJRA now number well over seventy with more than a dozen forming a sub-group which has been holding Zoom meetings to discuss next steps towards abolition of the EJRA. Constitutionally available steps have been set out with a view to ensuring that 'abolition' appears in the choices for the ballot. Arguments are being assembled in hopes that they may prove persuasive with voters against the claim that the EJRA protects the career hopes of the young.

A further problem is presenting itself in a call for a Discussion on a Topic of Concern likely to be scheduled for 28 May. The immediate prompt is the MRC's proposal to convert its units in the University into Centres of Research Excellence. The resulting consideration of the funding of MRC Units in the University will have implications for the job security of research and support staff whose salaries are not paid by the University. That includes both research staff and unestablished academics.

There *may* be severance, certainly increased insecurity. It is reported that the University has rejected applications

for promotion into established academic posts from research staff formerly found to be eligible. If the Discussion prompts a *Report* the decision about what is to happen will lie with the Regent House.

On 15 May the *Reporter* carried both a request for a Topic of Concern Discussion on the 'Abolition of forced Retirement' and a Council and General Board Report on the *University's Retirement Policy and Employer Justified Retirement Age* proposing to add two years to enforce retirement at 69 instead of 67 and to remove the EJRA from academic-related Officers but not University Teaching Officer academics. This had four Council dissenters, whose Dissenting Note was duly published with the *Report*. (The Cambridge Council has no collective responsibility.)

So job security and questions of severance have current complications in Cambridge with, ironically, the most secure of all, the University Officers, its only employees, faced with forced retirement.

G.R.EVANS

1. <https://www.ois.cam.ac.uk/system/files/documents/purpose-and-principles-of-the-scheme.pdf>
2. Special Ordinance C (ii) 12.
3. *Reporter*, 1 February, 2023.
4. Promised in the *Reporter* of 15 May.

REVIEWS

Evil-doing in Oxford

Roger Teichmann, *Dog's Twilight*, (Eucalyptus Titles: Oxford, 2024)



This book was represented to me as a crime novel, and I suppose you could call it that, although Roger Teichmann tells me that he thinks of it more as 'a psychological thriller with crime thrown in'; this just goes to show that 'mystery novel' is a family resemblance concept, or that genre identification isn't an exact science, or something. It is not really a 'mystery novel', inasmuch as we the readers are by and large privy to the criminal goings-on; nor is it really a 'detective novel', though a bit of detecting (not always very competent) does happen. One mystery which Teichmann leaves the reader to solve is the title (given that the novel's only (literal) dogs play a negligible role, hanging out of the window of a passing car or barking in a nearby garden), but once we learn that the soundtrack to much of Conrad Merrivale's life is Wagner, we can work out a decent theory.

Conrad, I should say, is one of the principal characters; he is an Eng. Lit. student at Oxford, and though Teichmann (my colleague in the Philosophy Faculty) affirms in the Author's Note that he has never encountered, 'either personally or professionally, any student resembling Conrad', I suspect he is being disingenuous. To be sure, I don't think I've ever had a student who is quite as devoid of conscience as Conrad ('Since when did shame do anyone any good?'), but I've had a few (not many, thankfully) students who are very nearly as idle as he is, and very nearly as much into drugs, and who profess something like his adolescent nihilistic 'philosophy', speaking with an accent 'three parts Estuary to one part unidentifiable' (though he seems to be able to drop it when necessary), and surely Teichmann has too. (One of my slight hesitations about the novel, however, is the worry that Conrad represents a certain stereotype of a student which outsiders are all too willing to believe is the norm.)

Conrad has a summer job at the fictional Marlborough Hotel, where a good deal of the action takes place, and a girlfriend (sorry, partner), Meg Owens, a singer-songwriter who lives in an attic room

in a shared house in Jericho. Staying at the Marlborough Hotel for a good part of the book is a very famous writer of fantasy novels, Tessa Wainwright, working on vol. 4 of *The Quest*, with personal as well as professional reasons for being back in Oxford from her Italian villa. We get a handful of excerpts from the developing vol. 4, which not only tell us what kind of fantasy novelist Wainwright is (her main characters Taskar and Lemula 'thee' and 'thou' each other throughout their titular 'quest', and 'methinks' makes a regular appearance), but also, at an abstract level, parallel the 'real-life' dilemmas which have brought Tessa to Oxford. Also staying in Oxford is her literary agent Vince Parker, an ex-policeman who plays a much bigger (and much nastier) role in the plot than one might expect from a literary agent. (Here I believe Teichmann when he declares that he has never known a literary agent like Vince.) There is a handful of other characters who play a role in the novel, not least Tess's son Ben and the mysterious and existentially ambiguous Mr. Hall, but that is the main cast of characters.

There is little more I can say about the plot without giving too much away. As one

might expect from someone whose official job is as a philosopher, there is a philosophy conference at the Marlborough, where they mostly discuss AI and transhumanism. The novel has a good sense of place (natives will enjoy descriptions of walks around Jericho, visits to the Godstow nunnery, and so on); the prose is lively (although I confess to a desire for a few more commas), with an undertone of gentle and sometimes pointed humour throughout; the characters are nothing if not colourful. There are moments when one might complain that Teichmann has taken Tessa's advice to a group of school pupils: 'Don't avoid a cliché if it feels right' (Conrad's backstory; the fact that the baddies all get an appropriate – albeit highly imaginative – comeuppance and the good guys get their reward). Nonetheless, altogether it's what's called a 'good read', and I look forward to Teichmann's next novel, out soon.

KATHERINE MORRIS

Portals into invisible worlds

Fiona Stafford, *Time and Tide: The Long Life of Landscape*. John Murray, 2024. £20.



The Gateway to Scampton Hall, Lincolnshire



Fiona Stafford is a Fellow of Somerville College, and a scholar of English Literature, especially the Romantic Movement. *Time and Tide* is to one side of her professional life, but there is a relation. Her literary approach is to respect the visitable world. In academia this is not always the case, since some critical practices regard texts as solipsistic entities, existing in their own vacuum. She would take the view that nature abhors a vacuum, and in this study she pays attention to the surrounding environments in Britain and Ireland and makes sense of them as entities with depth, histories, associations and connections with large structures of meanings, even if some of them, such as deserted airfields in the north east of England, don't, on the face of it, seem to have much to offer.

It is an intelligent and sensitive work and establishes how aware we should be of the places surrounding us, on many levels, including the literary and historical. This

northern and eastern England is Stafford's 'country of the heart', to use a beautiful phrase of D.H. Lawrence. It's not mine, since I prefer hills, such as the Clee Hills, blue and remembered, seen in the west from the top of Himley Hill in Dudley. Also in my view the best coasts have to face west. But she makes her locales come alive.

A number of themes hold the book together, such as drowned places and dessicated places. Information seems to be lost, and yet with care, or luck, can be retrieved, at least in the mind. What haunts the book is instability and remorseless change, not always for the better. Landscapes dominate, and yet they are locales for human lives which enrich perceptions of them, many of the actors in the unfolding dramas coming from her own family. Whittlesey Mere was once an enormous lake, and yet it has dried up, partly because of human intervention. There is always something touching about lost water. What is that Hopkins says in 'Inversnaid'?:

*What would the world be, once bereft
Of wet and of wildness? Let them be left,
O let them be left, wildness and wet;
Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet*

And yet there was something heroic about reclaiming land for utilitarian purposes. Tennyson's *Northern Farmer Old Style* 'stubbed Thurnaby waaste' with his bare hands, but people coming after will have the resources of the 'kittle o' steäm, [traction engine that is] huzzin' an' maäzin the blessed fields.' We see the process of dominating nature as far back as the sixteenth and early seventeenth century when in Ben Jonson's *The Devil is an Ass* Meer-craft and Engine persuade Fabian Fitzdotterel that he might become 'Duke of the Drowned-land.' Wicken Fen was saved. Auden mentions this place in a poem later called 'A Summer Night 1933', which he cruelly and irresponsibly vandalised, cutting out key lines in later editions, including these:

*'For what by nature and by training
We loved, has little strength remaining:
Though we would gladly give
The Oxford colleges, Big Ben,
And all the birds in Wicken Fen,
It has no wish to live.'*

There is now talk of reversing the process of human control and initiating rewilding. The reintroduction of red kites in the Chilterns is a success story. Unless one detests them.



John Glover. Thirlmere (circa 1820)

John Glover's (1767-1849) picture of Thirlmere in the Lake District circa 1820 to 1830 reminds us that there is another factor related to the history of landscapes: the process of inundation. When the proposal occurred to turn Thirlmere into a reservoir, and greatly increase its size, Ruskin wrote some stirring words of protest:

'But landscape, and living creature, and the soul of man, you are like to lose them all soon. I had many things to say to you ... of the little lake of Thirlmere, and stream of St. John's Vale, which Manchester, in its zeal for art, is about to drain from their mountain-fields into its water-closets.' (Fors Clavigera, Letter 79 (July 1877)).

In letter 82 of *Fors Clavigera* he wrote: 'I hold the hills and vales of my native land to be true temples of God, and their waves and clouds holier than the dew of the baptistery, and the incense of the altar.' (October 1877). He is over-loading his argument with a species of sacramentalism, and doesn't suggest where the Mancunians are going to get their water from. A church at Normanton was about to be demolished, as the level of Rutland Water rose in the 1970s, but it was rescued, and now stands in a surrealistic location just above the water.



*St Matthew's Church, Normanton.
On Rutland Water.*

Stafford does not mention the Elan Valley, but this was flooded at the end of the nineteenth century to provide water for Birmingham, and in the process Nantgwyllt, a house Shelley and his young wife stayed in in 1812, was lost. A classic case of inundation.



*Nantgwyllt House in the Elan Valley.
Now 'all is in an enormous dark/, Drowned'.*

Shelley lavishes beautiful prose on the valley:

'Rocks piled on each other to tremendous heights, rivers formed into cataracts by their projections, and valleys clothed with woods, present an appearance of enchantment.'

He writes:

'This country is highly romantic; here are rocks of uncommon height and picturesque waterfalls. I am more astonished at the grandeur of the scenery than I expected.' During droughts the relics of the house are visible. It was the basis for Francis Brett-Young's The House Under the Water (1932).

Nearby is Lake Vyrnwy, created so that Liverpool could be provided with water, burying the village of Llanwyddn. During the drought of 1959 when I visited it the sad relics were visible. In about 1957 my brother and I cycled from Fort William to Skye on the old Road to the Isles in pouring rain. No longer exactly possible, because a section of the road is now beneath the artificially enlarged Loch Loyne, and the A87 has been redirected. During droughts the remains of an elegant bridge comes into view. The old A 87 is visible in the 1953 edition of my treasured *Bartholomew's Road Atlas*.



Drought at Loch Loyne

Islands are fascinating and intriguing for Stafford, especially Barra, the home of Compton Mackenzie and the inspiration for *Whisky Galore* when SS *Politician* was wrecked. Stafford does not mention it, but Compton Mackenzie's obsession with islands prompted D.H. Lawrence to write 'The Man who Loved Islands', so close to the bone that Compton Mackenzie sought to prevent its publication by Secker. Louis MacNeice visited him in 1938 with the artist Nancy Sharp, prompting the beautiful poem 'Leaving Barra':

*For fretful even in leisure
I fidget for different values,
Restless as a gull and haunted
By a hankering after Atlantis...*

His Scottish visits also occasioned one of my favourite ten poems from the whole of English Literature, 'Bagpipe Music': 'The

glass [the barometer that is] is falling hour by hour, the glass will fall for ever, /But if you break the bloody glass you won't hold up the weather.' Another writer associated with this part of the world was George Orwell, who wrote *Ninety Eighty Four* on Jura. We are celebrating the 75th anniversary of its publication next month.

Nature is always a formidable force when encountering mankind, and Stafford explores the history of the Solway Firth and the railway bridge which crossed it, but ultimately succumbed. It's fortunate that, unlike the Tay Bridge, there was no major disaster, otherwise the bridge would have suffered the twin indignity of collapse and McGonagal doggerel.



Remains of the Solway Viaduct

Here there are familial associations, with her grandfather and father engaged in Haaf-net fishing. Enormous nets were used, and the subject opens to vertiginous prospects of history, such as Walter Scott's *Redgauntlet*.

Sometimes the uncanny breaks in, as with the figure at Wickenby airbase encountered by Michael Bentine in the moonlight, but by that time he 'was already dead.' This reminds me of the famous ghostly encounter between Wilfred Owen and his brother Harold, who was on board the British cruiser HMS *Astraea* just after the First World War while the ship was at anchor off the coast of Camerouns:

'I had gone down to my cabin thinking to write some letters. I drew aside the door curtain and stepped inside and to my amazement I saw Wilfred sitting in my chair. I felt shock run through me with appalling force and with it I could feel the blood draining away from my face. I did not rush towards him but walked jerkily into the cabin – all my limbs stiff and slow to respond. I did not sit down but looking at him I spoke quietly: 'Wilfred, how did you get here?'

He did not rise and I saw that he was involuntarily immobile, but his eyes which had never left mine were alive with the familiar look of trying to make me understand; when I spoke his whole face broke into his sweetest and most endearing dark smile. I felt not fear – I had none when I first drew my door curtain and saw him there – only exquisite mental pleasure at thus beholding him. He was in uniform and I remember thinking how out of place the khaki looked amongst the cabin furnishings. With this thought I must have turned my eyes away from him; when I looked back my cabin chair was empty...

I wondered if I had been dreaming but look-

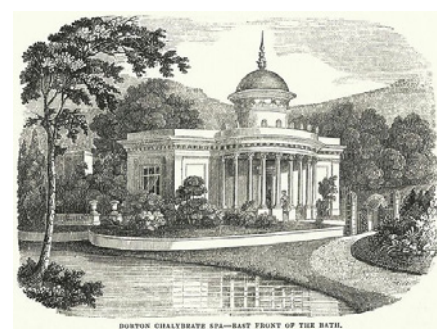
ing down I saw that I was still standing. Suddenly I felt terribly tired and moving to my bunk I lay down; instantly I went into a deep oblivious sleep. When I woke up I knew with absolute certainty that Wilfred was dead.'

Harold learned only later that his brother had been killed a week before this experience occurred. Moving, perhaps, but dubious nevertheless?

In the chapter 'Red Springs' Stafford does get close to Oxford with an account of the Dorton Spa near Brill.



James Hakewill's design for Dorton Spa



Dorton Spa. From *The Mirror of Literature, Amusement, and Instruction*. Saturday, 31 August 1839.



Dorton Spa in ruins. Circa 1900.

It has now disappeared, except for a few fragments, but in the 1830s it was a splendid enterprise, designed by James Hakewill (1778-1843). My ears prick up here, because Turner did watercolours for his *A Picturesque Tour of Italy* (1820, published by Murray, the same publishers responsible for *Time and Tide*). These paintings were based on Hakewill's drawings, since

Turner had not yet been to Italy. His notebook *Route to Rome* (1819, No. 171) contains notes from Hakewill on things to see. Hakewill was in the competition for the design of the Houses of Parliament. The spa was demolished circa 1910.

It is mentioned in Freddy Bateson's *Short History of Brill* (1966). He was my predecessor as Lecturer in English at Corpus Christi College, and ventured into Oxford from Brill in a minute Fiat 500. He started a don's discussion group, which Jonathan Wordsworth described as 'Freddie and the Dreamers' (after a now-forgotten pop-group). I digress. It's at this point that one regrets the absence of illustrations, since they would liven up the book considerably. It would be nice to see pictures of the Roman mosaic discovered by Cayley Illingworth at Scampton in 1795.



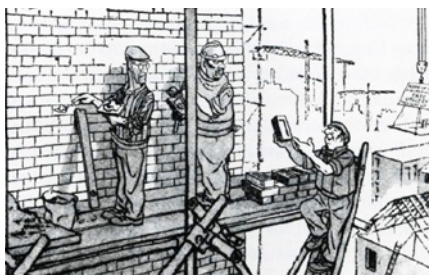
The Scampton Mosaic

And we need an image of the gateway to Scampton House, which is important in the theme of the doorway into other times. The Jacobean manor has disappeared without trace, and I have not been able to find an image of it. Another image needed is of the lovely medieval triple bridge at Crowland, no longer spanning streams though.



Crowland, Lincolnshire: Trinity Bridge

In her chapter on bricks she mentions the Giles cartoon on the occasion of the notorious Carl Andre's 120 fire-bricks, but we need the image.



Giles in the *Daily Express*: 'The repose and calm of this work reflects the simplicity and restraint of my earlier period, the symbolism remains personal and eludes exact interpretation.' (19 February 1976)

I suppose Turner's *Staffa* is too well-known to need reproduction. Ditto David Hockney's *Garrowby Hill* with its giddy-sweep of road.

In a sense this book is a pitch for a television series, in which the images will be available – provided they are not too obscured by a presenter with Trumpian hands playing an invisible concertina. In another sense the book reads like preliminary material for poems, which would be more concentrated, and where the present-tensism might be less irritating. Here she is on the sea:

'A day out at the sea means a day of immediate physical intensity – the barefoot sensation of wet sand, the sound of gulls and dogs and families, the taste and smell of salty air, the mind-emptying plunge into cold water.'

One of reminded of Philip Larkin's 'To the Sea' – but that is superior:

*'Everything crowds under the low horizon:
Steep beach, blue water, towels, red bathing caps,
The small hushed waves' repeated fresh collapse
Up the warm yellow sand, and further off
A white steamer stuck in the afternoon –
Still going on, all of it, still going on!'*

The readership for *Time and Tide* has to have a certain level of literacy. She refers obliquely to Marvell's 'Thou by the Indian Ganges' side/ Shouldst rubies find; I by the tide/ Of Humber would complain' from 'To His Coy Mistress'. 'The road less travelled' is an unsignalled allusion to Robert Frost. And 'all things original, spare and strange' to Hopkins's 'Pied Beauty', although an 'and' is added.

Even readers who count themselves as well-informed will find plenty of novelties here. I didn't know, for instance, that planes in World War II had homing pigeons on board, so that if they were downed the birds could fly home and sound an alert. This led to the 'Destruction of Peregrine Falcons Order' of 1940. And I didn't know about the Spaniard who was shipwrecked in the Armada, Francisco de Cuéllar, found his way back home and wrote an account for the King of Spain.

BERNARD RICHARDS

Schizophrenic about Oxford

A.D. Harvey, *Dezzie and the Historian*. Austin MaCauley Publishers, 2022. £8.99.



The plot is straightforward. In the author's words ;

"A black teenager with a criminal record absconds from a council children's home, moves in with a failed academic old enough to be her grandfather, and discovers that dreams really can come true – up to a point".

Dezzie's dream is living in "the time warp called Oxford" married to an Oxford historian, Rupert Roberts.

"Right from the start I thought he was the most amazingly interesting person I'd ever met. The funniest, and the kindest and most tolerant...."

Arriving in Oxford she soon realised that Rupert didn't actually like the place "For him Oxford was Disappointmentsville". It was not long before she encountered academic prejudice; "there was something skew-whiffed about Oxford values" as Rupert had told her.

The dream moves through the conventionally dissolute, contemporary teenage trials of exams, drugs, sex – but ending up with the offer of a place at New College – and comes to its sudden terminal awakening. Rupert's reputation is in ruins after the police question him after a complaint relating to an affair twenty years earlier. He received a suspended prison sentence;

"enough to make two columns in The Oxford Mail and a paragraph in The Times and The Daily Telegraph".

After Rupert dies following a hit-and-run accident Dezzie, the narrator in the novel, herself succumbs to bowel cancer at the end of her first undergraduate year, leaving the story as a testament to their lives together. On a final page she notes that Rupert left behind mostly transcriptions from rarely opened volumes in the Taylorian and Bodleian. But he did leave "a few disjointed sentences and paragraphs which were published that autumn in two successive issues of *The Oxford Magazine*"

As the reader will have guessed Arnold Harvey is an Oxford-trained historian who has written on many occasions for *Oxford Magazine* but who has distinctly mixed feelings about the place. Apart from becoming an antiques dealer, roving academic and novel writer, he is a prolific author of academic historical studies. One can hardly avoid wondering about the degree to which the tale is autobiographical and I am pretty sure that he intends to tantalize us in this way. He insists that this is his swan song and consciously politically incorrect.

T.J.H.

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CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS ISSUE

James Stevens Curl is the author of many books, including *The Erosion of Oxford* (1977) and (with Susan Wilson) *The Oxford Dictionary of Architecture* (2015, 2016) • A.W.F. Edwards was Professor of Biometry at Cambridge and is a Life Fellow of Gonville and Caius • G.R. Evans was Professor of Medieval Theology and Intellectual History at Cambridge • Aissa Dearing (they/she) is a DPhil student in Geography and the Environment researching at the nexus of Native American sovereignty, Black liberation, carbon removal, and anthropogenic climate change solutioning • Katherine Morris is a supernumerary fellow in philosophy at Mansfield College • Bernard Richards is an Emeritus Fellow of Brasenose College